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Courtney's Legislation to Reduce Workplace Violence Garner Support from a Host of Professionals and Labor Organizations

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Joe Courtney (CT-02), a senior Member of the House Education and Labor Committee, introduced the *Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act*, a bill to curb rising rates of workplace violence facing health care and social service employees such as nurses, physicians, emergency responders, medical assistants, and social service workers. The bill is co-sponsored by Congressman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (VA-03), Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, Congresswoman Alma Adams (NC-12) Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections as well as 24 other members of Congress, and would direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue a standard requiring health care and social service employers to write and implement a workplace violence prevention plan to prevent and protection employees from violent incidents in the workplace.

Congressman Courtney's *Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act* has received support from a host of health care and social service professionals, as well as unions representing workers in these sectors. A full list of supporting organizations and endorsements can be viewed below:

Randi Weingarten – President, American Federation of Teachers: “Our nurses and health industry workers care every day for the sick, the elderly and the mentally ill, yet they often feel unsafe or unprotected themselves from the assaults that occur in hospitals and other healthcare-related settings. While the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has left these workers vulnerable, incidents of workplace violence continue to rise with 69 percent of reported cases occurring in healthcare settings. Thankfully, this bill addresses this increasing trend head-on and provides long-needed protections and specific and enforceable safety standards for people who work in front-line healthcare jobs.

Jean Ross, RN – Co-President, National Nurses United: “As nurses who work at the bedside, our union has seen violence reach epidemic proportions in our hospitals and clinics. Employers’ failure to prevent violence not only harms nurses and other healthcare workers, but it harms our patients too. That’s why our union fought for—and won—a landmark workplace violence prevention standard in California and why we applaud Rep. Courtney for moving forward legislation to create comprehensive federal protections for nurses and other healthcare professionals against violence on the job. We know that violence can be prevented when employers establish plans that are tailored to fit the risks at each workplace and each patient care unit with the input of nurses and other workers at the bedside. Nurses look forward to working with Congress on the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act, and we encourage every Representative to cosponsor this legislation.”

Richard L. Trumka – President, AFL-CIO: “Workplace violence is a serious safety and health problem that has reached epidemic levels. Nurses, medical assistants, emergency responders and social workers face some of the greatest threats, suffering more than 70% of all workplace assaults. With no federal OSHA standard in place, the problem is growing, but the Trump administration has refused to act. We applaud the introduction of the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act by Rep. Joe Courtney to force action to protect our caregivers from unnecessary injuries and death.”

Angelo McClain, PhD, LICSW – Chief Executive Office of the National Association of Social Workers: “The National Association of Social Workers is proud to support the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act. This bill is a crucial step in reducing the staggering number of *preventable* physical and psychological assaults on social workers and other health and social services professionals. NASW supports these and other measures to protect these professionals, who provide a wide range of critically needed services in increasingly complex and dangerous settings.”

Ernest Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN – President, American Nurses Association: “The American Nurses Association, representing the nation’s 4 million registered nurses, is indebted to the members of Congress who remain steadfast in championing this critical legislation. We believe in this bill because it underscores the urgency to address existing workplace cultures that discourage nurses from reporting for fear of retribution and to implement plans that prevent incidence of violence in the workplace. Safe work environments and quality care are not mutually exclusive, both must be considered in order to promote positive health outcomes for patients and communities. This bill is a step towards meaningful progress to prevent incidents of violence in all health care settings and we thank Rep. Courtney for introducing this legislation.”

Mary Florio – President, AFSCME Affiliate Connecticut Health Care Associates: “As a Registered Nurse, I have experienced an assault while tending to a patient. The statistics prove what we already knew. Workplace violence is an ongoing and growing problem for health care professionals. Our coworkers in emergency rooms and behavioral health care facilities regularly interact with patients and their families who are acting out and may become violent.”

“Short staffing and limited trained security staff drastically increase the potential for a staff member who is providing care to be assaulted and injured. We will continue to be a voice in developing and implementing legislation needed to protect our co-workers. We applaud Congressman Joe Courtney’s ongoing efforts to address this issue and support his legislation to address these issues.”

Martha Baker, RN – Chairperson, Nurse Alliance of SEIU Healthcare: “No healthcare worker should fear the threat of violence and injury while at work caring for others. The 80,000 registered nurse members of the Nurse Alliance of SEIU Healthcare have a long history of advocating for quality care standards and safer workplaces for all nurses and healthcare workers. This legislation, which directs the Occupational Health and Safety Administration to issue a workplace violence prevention standard, is an important first step to ensure our healthcare employers provide a safe environment where workers, patients and families are protected from preventable violence.”

Patricia Kunz Howard, PhD, RN, CEN, CPEN, TCRN, NE-BC, FAEN, FAAN – President, Emergency Nurses Association: “Emergency nurses should never fear going to work. They should not have their focus on patient care disrupted by worries of being punched, kicked or choked. ENA strongly supports legislative efforts which aim to mitigate the epidemic of violence in the emergency department, empower nurses to report violent incidents with confidence, and ensure the ED is a safe environment where emergency nurses think solely about their commitment to care without concerns about being victimized.”

Leo W. Gerard – President, United Steel Workers International: “We applaud the introduction of this bill requiring OSHA to finally address the epidemic of workplace violence against health care and social service workers. For too long, our members working across health care settings and job classifications have lived with the knowledge that they could fall victim to violence just by doing their jobs. Workplace violence is preventable, and our union supports this bill.”

Shanna Devine – Worker Health and Safety Advocate, Public Citizen’s Congress Watch Division: “Health care and social service workers are on the frontlines of keeping patients safe, often at great risk to themselves. It is inexcusable that the very workers who care for our loved ones also experience the highest rates of workplace violence. With reports of violence on the rise, we cannot afford to wait while OSHA drags its feet on regulatory protections. Congress must advance this critical legislation without delay.”

Supporting organizations also include:

The American Federation of Government Employees

United Auto Workers

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters

The American Association of Fire Fighters

The American Psychiatric Nurses Association

The American Industrial Hygiene Association Public Citizen

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